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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, April 25, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Costless Home Improvements -- How Mississippi Women Did It." Information from the Extension Service, U.S.D.A.

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Probably more farm families have been thinking about the homes they live in during the past few months than they have ever before. Much of this thinking was started with the Farm Housing Survey last January when Uncle Sam's Civil Works Administration began a study of what farm homes all over the country needed to make them more livable. And now here comes the week in spring which for years has been celebrated as a home improvement week.

This is the one national week of the year which you can properly celebrate by being discontented and critical of your home, provided, of course, that you then go ahead and do something about it -- something to make your house better-looking or more comfortable and convenient.

Have you ever noticed that when the subject of home improvement comes up in the conversation, somebody is sure to say, "Of course, I'd like to fix up my house. It certainly needs lots of improving. But I just can't afford it. I'm not going in for anything expensive this year."

Expensive? Can't afford improvements? Wait until I tell you a story or two about what the women in the State of Mississippi did last year to improve their homes on little or no money at all. They proved that a woman can often do a great deal for the house she is living in without spending, if she uses ingenuity and perseverance and good, old-fashioned elbow grease.

For example, those Mississippi women had one home problem that we all have-- floors. Floors will wear down, get old-looking and hard to clean. Every so often floors will need refinishing. That may be an expensive job. Stains and varnish and wax take money. So does the man who comes to do the job. Well, a group of women belonging to home demonstration clubs decided to do their own floors with the help of the extension specialist -- refinish their own floors and, what's more, make their own floor stain and polishing wax and so on. The homemade stain they used was an oil mixture. As you know, oiling is an economical way of finishing kitchen, pantry, and porch floors, and is especially satisfactory for pine floors.

For polishing their floors these women melted together beeswax, paraffin and turpentine. You'll notice that I said "melted." A mixture like this containing turpentine must be heated with great care or it may catch fire.

That's one example of what woman's ingenuity can do for home improvement when money is scarce. Here's another, also from Mississippi.

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The great need in many homes through the country was comfortable beds. Because people couldn't afford to buy new mattresses, they were getting along with old, hard, lumpy ones year after year. The extension specialist had a happy idea. Why not make your own mattress using the surplus cotton that many families had and couldn't sell? She went into a mattress factory, worked there until she learned mattress-making from start to finish, and then went out into the counties and taught the process to the women. She loaned them needles. They bought thread and tufts at wholesale prices. Instead of ticking, they used the sugar sacks they had on hand. Some of these women not only equipped their own homes with the much-needed new mattresses, but also made money by selling them. The negro women also found mattress-making at home a profitable business. In one county last year, colored women turned out forty-eight good-looking, comfortable mattresses and sold many of them.

Then there was the problem of furniture. Many homes needed new chairs, for example. Here again the women did a good job of producing new from old. They learned to make new seats for chairs of such materials as corn shucks, splints, cord or cane. One woman who needed chairs badly found in her barn loft four chairs with broken seats that had been discarded years before. She re-seated these chairs with corn shucks and painted them. Then she had a new set all for the twenty-nine cents that the paint had cost.

The men and women together made many kinds of comfortable and good-looking furniture by using old lumber or reed or willow. The Extension Department aided by sending out blue prints and directions. Last year in Mississippi 4533 of these blue prints were sent out in answer to requests.

A woman who won first place in her community in kitchen improvement fixed up an attractive and comfortable kitchen rest corner for exactly twenty-five cents. She had a big, old-fashioned, country kitchen, where she needed a place to sit and read or sew in her spare minutes. So, in one corner, she put a comfortable rocking chair and beside it a table which she had made herself using a cheese-box for the top and old broom handles for legs. This convenient little table held books and sewing. The cheerful curtains at the window she made from flour sacks. The rug was a home-made rag rug. A magazine stand and sewing box completed the rest corner.

Mississippi women also put on a campaign for more healthful homes last year, especially for proper screening and mosquito control. They arranged to drain ponds that were breeding places of mosquitos. And they reported that none of the homes that were screened according to specifications had malaria during the summer when it was raging.

So much for the accomplishments of Mississippi women in the home improvement line last year. Next week, I'll tell you what women in other states have done.

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